

Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping

The GreenMan



Sharing your holidays with wildlife

However you prepare to decorate for the upcoming holiday season, you might want to expand your spirit of giving to include your feathered and furred neighbors. You will find that creating colorful, edible outdoor ornaments is a fun, imaginative, and rewarding activity that will bring your family closer together, and may launch a wonderful new tradition.

An increasingly popular trend is to get double-duty out of one's decorations. For example, make garlands for your indoor Christmas tree using dried fruits and berries and later decorate an outdoor tree with that same garland. You may then move a cut Christmas tree with such garlands outdoors after the holidays (after removing lights and other ornaments), leaving it near a window where the whole family can watch the birds and other critters enjoy the feast.

Some of the more popular garlands are made from cranberries, slices of dried apricots, oranges, apples, and pears, raw peanuts, and popcorn. Use carpet thread, heavy twine, or even waxed dental floss and a strong needle,

such as those used for needle-point or tapestry work, and either string a garland of cranberries or popcorn by itself, or create a multicolored treat by alternating a mixture of berries and dried fruits. Popcorn garlands should be salt and shortening-free. However, as the popcorn often splits in the process, you may prefer to use in-the-shell peanuts instead. Never use clear fishing line, which is difficult for wildlife

to see and which might ensnare an unwitting visitor.

The same principle can be applied to wreathes, swags, and garlands for railings and doorways. Begin by using grapevines or fresh-cut evergreens, like pine and cedar, wired together to form a swag or wreath, into which you can interweave sprays of white proso millet and elderberry, dried seedhead clusters from sumac, sorghum, purple



coneflower, and Rudbeckia, as well as a cornucopia of dried fruits, rose hips, berries, and nuts. You can also purchase pre-fabricated straw wreaths or evergreen wreaths and garland to achieve the same effect with a bit less effort.

Doubling the fun with indoor/outdoor decorations has caught on so well that a number of upscale retailers like Smith & Hawken and Gardener's Supply Company now offer their own festive versions of homemade swags, wreathes, bouquets, and centerpieces, including bouquet refills to keep birds coming back.

Of course, if you find the idea of festooning your formal parlor with popcorn somewhat unappealing, you can always designate an outdoor Yuletide Tree for your nature-friendly efforts. You can certainly use any of the above notions and augment them with additional treats, perhaps fresh fruit garlands of grapes, pieces of orange and apple, blueberries, golden raisins, and so forth, or simply turn to the pinecone, the most popular and foolproof wildlife ornament of all.

Start by collecting large pine cones, such as those from loblolly or longleaf pines, and deftly cover them with peanut butter - the crunchier the better. Let kids use their little fingers to reach into all the tight spots. Roll the pine cones in a commercial mix

of bird seed, or blend your own using black oil sunflower seeds and millet. Use red twine or yarn to hang the ornaments from the bare branches of deciduous trees like dogwoods, or secure to any of the pines and spruces around your yard. Be sure to place the cones in trees you can easily watch.

Your pinecone treats can be jazzed up by mixing peanut butter with suet or substituting suet altogether. You can also add raisins, cranberries, and minced pieces of unsalted nuts and dried fruits to your seed mix to make the ornaments more colorful and more appealing for birds.

Additional ornaments can be made from slices of stale bread by using cookie cutters to cut out fanciful holiday shapes like gingerbread men, stars, evergreen trees, Christmas stockings, and even Santa himself! Let the bread harden overnight, coat with peanut butter or suet, and adorn with your seed mixture. Bagels, sliced in half, and similarly spread with peanut butter and seeds, may be hung outdoors on your favorite tree.

Naturally, if you plan to spend the better part of a month tracking down hard-to-find Harry Potter paraphernalia, you might not want to invest time in home-spun arts-and-crafts. Fear not! You will quickly find wildlife and gardening-oriented merchants

offering a constellation of red and green star-shaped suet feeders, suet and seed encrusted holiday bells, stars, and Christmas tree shapes. There are commercial peanut bags, which lack the panache of the traditional red stocking that St. Nick favors, and egg cartons filled with a dozen assorted songbird "eggs," as well as pricey edible bird "cottages."

Lastly, if the ground has not frozen over, you can always give one of the best gifts of all to nature by planting a native tree or shrub to provide nuts or berries to a wide variety of local wildlife for many years to come. Then you may hang a peanut butter pinecone on it after you're done.

Best Bets for Winter Berries

American Cranberry
Arrowwood Viburnum
Blackhaw Viburnum
Dwarf or Shining Sumac
Mapleleaf Viburnum
Possumhaw Viburnum
Red Chokeberry
Smooth Sumac
Staghorn Sumac
Winterberry Holly

For more information on habitat-friendly plantings, see our fact-sheets *Berries, Branches, and Blooms for Winter*, and *Versatile Viburnum for a Vibrant Landscape*.



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